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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [EINV](#) [LA](#) [KN](#) [KS](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTH KOREAN DCM DISCUSSES NORTH KOREAN PREMIER'S VISIT TO LAOS

Classified By: Ambassador Ravic Huso. Reason: 1.4 b and d.

**¶1.** (C) Summary: The South Korean DCM told the DCM on November 9 that Lao officials had described the November 4-7 visit of North Korean Premier Kim Jong Il as very successful.

The Lao Prime Minister praised North Korea's handling of Korean peninsula issues. Lao officials described Premier Kim as friendly, comfortable, and relaxed. The visit appears to have been an opportunity for Laos, which seeks to balance its relations with the two Koreas, as a way to reassure North Korea that it is not tilting too sharply toward South Korea, which is an increasingly significant player here. End summary.

**¶2.** (C) South Korean DCM Sang Ryol Lee told the DCM on November 9 that the South Korean government has followed the November 4-7 visit to Laos of North Korean Premier Kim Jong Il with a great deal of interest. Mr. Lee said that Lao government officials had described the visit of the North Korean Premier as very fruitful and successful. The two sides discussed Korean peninsula issues, but Mr. Lee is not sure whether nuclear issues came up. Lao Prime Minister Bouasone Bouphavanh, he said, had praised North Korea's handling of its relationship with South Korea and welcomed the North-South summit talks. Mr. Lee said that, according to Lao officials, Premier Kim was very friendly, comfortable, and relaxed and appeared satisfied with the visit, which was, according to Mr. Lee, the highest-level visit of a North Korean official to Laos in 15 years. He noted that Premier Kim is scheduled to take part in a bilateral meeting with his South Korean counterpart in Seoul on November 16.

**¶3.** (C) Mr. Lee said that Vice Foreign Minister Phongsavath Boupha had said at a November 7 dinner hosted by South Korean Ambassador Park Jae-Hyun that he believes that North Korea is interested in investing in Laos. This is of necessity a long-term interest, since at present Pyongyang does not have capital to invest. Mr. Lee noted that, in addition to Laos, Premier Kim visited Vietnam, Cambodia, and Malaysia on this trip. He commented that, given recent positive developments in the Six-Party Talks, the North Koreans may be exploring models for increasing economic engagement with the outside world within a socialist framework.

**¶4.** (C) Comment: Both North and South Korea have embassies in Vientiane, and the Lao government aims to balance its relationships with the two countries. However, South Korea has emerged in recent years as an important presence in Laos, with significant investment and a growing role as a bilateral donor. North Korea has a much lower profile here. The GOL may have seen the visit, which received a large amount of coverage in the government-controlled press, as an opportunity to reassure North Korea that it is not tilting too sharply toward South Korea.

